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New NPS Graduate Certificate Program Provides Context, History to Great Power Competition

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MC2 Nathan K. Serpico | February 10, 2021



A new graduate certificate program in Great Power Competition (GPC) at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) is providing the initial cohort of 31 Navy and Marine Corps students with the history and context of GPC, supporting a deeper understanding of its strategic implications. It's just one of several GPC-related programs now in campus.

Four weeks into the first course of a brand-new distance learning graduate certificate program in Great Power Competition (GPC) at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), and 31 Navy and Marine Corps students are already recognizing the role of the program in understanding the deeper, strategic implications of GPC.

With the recent release of the **CNOs Navigation Plan 2021** and the **Tri-Service Maritime Strategy**, NPS is continuing to advance GPC programs across the virtual and physical campus. In addition to the new program, recent events like the virtual Secretary of the Navy Guest Lecture with the former commander of U.S. Strategic Command retired Adm. Cecil Haney on the subject of “**Great Power Competition in the Cognitive Age**,” and an additional maritime security certificate focused on maritime domain challenges, are leading to a full spectrum of GPC-related educational opportunities.

“The GPC DL Certificate is well-situated to respond to recent strategic documents that are all centered around the DOD’s strategic shift to GPC,” said Cmdr. Paul Rasmussen, National Security Affairs (NSA) Department Program Officer, “particularly in educating the leaders charged to develop and execute this strategy.”

Within the GPC certificate program, the NSA Department included an education skill requirement aimed at “analyzing the factors shaping the new era of increasing geopolitical competition among the major powers” and “understanding Chinese and Russian activities and potential U.S. response across all dimensions of power, including diplomacy, economic competition, influence campaigns and traditional military force.”

According to U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Shane Kraft, an NPS DL student serving as the Executive Officer for Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron (VMU) 3, the course has offered him an opportunity to analyze the history behind current global contention, which has improved his understanding of strategic relationships in the modern world.

“I feel that pursuing a comprehensive understanding of global, geopolitical interactions is important for any servicemember, and this curriculum is an opportunity to develop that knowledge,” said Kraft.

While the term “Great Power Competition” can cover a wide spectrum of topics, program organizers have developed a curriculum for students to understand the nature of GPC historically, as well as its current dynamics. The objective is to have students learn and understand the core motivations behind peer adversaries, like China and Russia, and the political, economic and defense challenges they present. The various courses will analyze the tools China and Russia use to further their interests in various regions of the world and in cyberspace, as well as discuss the range of possible U.S. and allied responses to peer-nation behavior.

As a microcosm of NPS as a whole, the core goal of the curriculum is to deepen the critical-thinking skills of its military officer students.

“I am often exposed to aspects of Great Power Competition in briefs, discussions, and training, so I thought it would be professionally enhancing to pursue a broader and deeper understanding of the topic,” noted Cmdr. Sean Welch, an NPS DL student serving at Commander, Submarine Squadron 15.

“At my current command, the information from the course will help me add to any discussions, training, or briefs on the current GPC environment,” he added. “At my next command, it will help me lead those discussions.”

In today’s digital age, it’s imperative for leaders to stay current as information can change and spread throughout the world in a few clicks of a keyboard. For leaders who consistently deepen their understanding of GPC and allow their subordinates to follow suit, the program helps them to lead a more adept crew ready to respond.

“As a senior officer, this broader understanding of great power competition is foundational for understanding and acting within today’s strategic environment,” said DL student Navy Capt. Chris Cavanaugh. “In my situation as the Submarine Force officer community manager,” Cavanaugh explained, “participating in an NPS distance learning program is giving me a firsthand perspective on how best to integrate advanced education opportunities into officer career paths.”

Due to a strong demand, Rasmussen noted that NPS is offering an **in-resident version** of the GPC Certificate. The course is slated to begin in the upcoming Spring Quarter with registration already open.

The next cohort for the DL version of the GPC Certificate is set to begin in July with the hope of opening up the program to Air Force and Army active-duty personnel, as well as DOD civilians. For more information on the program, and to submit an application package, contact NSA Program Officer Cmdr. Paul Rasmussen at **nsaprogramofficer@nps.edu**.